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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of interaction among black and white university students while considering the nature of the situation and the race involved. A questionnaire consisting of 15 situations of an academic, social, and professional nature was administered to 314 freshman and sophomore students (60 percent male, 40 percent female, 56 percent white and 44 percent black). Data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance and Scheffe post hoc tests. Results indicated that regardless of race, students tended to feel most comfortable in an integrated situation (50 percent black, 50 percent white), less comfortable when they were in the majority, and least comfortable when they were in the minority. Exceptions where students preferred to be in the majority involved the situations of a party, a blind date, and having major surgery performed. Whites generally felt more comfortable than blacks in most situations. Blacks felt more comfortable than whites in an integrated neighborhood or dorm situation. Whites felt more comfortable than blacks being in a minority when discussing civil rights. Implications of the results for educators were discussed. It was concluded that while there were some negative findings, generally the results appeared to indicate that blacks and whites are approaching equality in their relations with one another. (Author)

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of interaction among black and white university students while considering the nature of the situation and the race of those involved. A questionnaire consisting of 15 situations of an academic, social and professional nature was administered to 314 freshman and sophomore students (60% male, 40% female, 56% white and 44% black). Data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance and Scheffé post hoc tests. Results indicated that, regardless of race, students tended to feel most comfortable in an integrated situation (50% black, 50% white), less comfortable when they were in the majority, and least comfortable when they were in the minority. Exceptions where students preferred to be in the majority involved the situations of a party, a blind date, and having major surgery performed. Whites generally felt more comfortable than blacks in most situations. Blacks felt more comfortable than whites in an integrated neighborhood or dorm situation. Whites felt more comfortable than blacks being a minority when discussing civil rights. Implications of the results for educators were discussed. It was concluded that while there were some negative findings, generally the results appeared to indicate that blacks and whites are approaching equality in their relations with one another.

As our society and education system have moved toward integration and more apparent equality, there still exist many doubts about the abilities of blacks and whites to interact with one another inside and outside the classroom. Amir (1969), in an extensive review of the literature on contact among people from different ethnic groups, concluded that unless increased contact occurs under relatively favorable conditions, negative results are more likely to occur than positive results. Favorable conditions include the conditions that there be equal status and mutually perceived benefits to each group.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1975) note that often "integration" means "I will *let* you come to *my* school." Thus as white schools are integrated, quite often black students start out with less than equal status, and whites perceive no benefits to the change. However, several recent developments indicate that it would be timely to examine the nature of the interaction among black and white university students. First, increasing numbers of university students have attended desegregated high schools. Second, more black students are entering universities than ever before. Sedlacek, Merritt and Brooks (1975) report that at large universities the national median percent of black freshmen has increased from 3% in 1969-70 to 6% in 1973-74.

When examining attitudes of whites toward blacks it has been demonstrated that the situational context is particularly important. That is, whites tend to be most tolerant of blacks in situations involving little personal contact (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1972; Sedlacek, Brooks and Mindus, 1973).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of interaction among black and white university students while considering the nature of the situation and the race of those involved.

Method

A questionnaire consisting of 15 situations of an academic, social and professional nature was developed after pilot studies determining the relevance of the situations for assessing black-white interactions. Five separate forms of the instrument were developed. Each contained the same situations except the word "black," "white," or "integrated" was inserted in each situation. Forms A and B contain the word "white" and were administered to black subjects. Forms C and D contain the word "black" and were administered to white subjects. Form E states the situations in an "integrated" context and was given to both black and white subjects.

Different social settings were also ascribed to each form. Form A indicates "You are in a setting where there are no blacks except yourself." Form D, a counterpart to Form A, says "You are in a setting where there are no whites except yourself." Forms A and D represent a minority condition. Forms B and C indicate blacks and whites respectively to be in the numerical majority. Form E states that there are equal numbers of blacks and whites present. Subjects were asked to respond to a five point Likert scale from very comfortable to very uncomfortable for each situation.

An unweighted means two-way Analysis of Variance (fixed effects - .05 level) with form (3 levels - minority, majority and equal) and race (2 levels - black and white) was conducted. Scheffé post hoc comparisons (.10 level) were made on appropriate differences found.

Forms were administered to 314 freshman and sophomore students during regular classroom periods at the University of Maryland. The sample was 60% male, 40% female, 56% white and 44% black. Forms were distributed in such a way as to give each student an approximately equal chance of being assigned to any

particular experimental condition. Cell sizes varied from 37 to 60. No differences among the cells were found on sex, class or college of enrollment (χ^2 - .05). A team of black and white experimenters administered the forms.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and significant results by form and race. Results indicate that all of the 15 items were significantly different on form, 10 were significantly different on race, and four were significant on the interaction.

The results by form indicate that regardless of race students tended to feel most comfortable in an integrated situation, less comfortable when they were in the majority and least comfortable when they were in the minority. Integrated was the most comfortable condition in all situations, but in situations 9 (party), 10 (blind date) and 15 (major surgery) subjects felt more comfortable being in the majority rather than the minority (Scheffé .10 level). In situations 8 (walking down the street), 11 (divorce suit) and 14 (sex counseling) there were no significant differences in comfort in being in the majority or minority.

The results by race indicate that whites felt more comfortable than blacks, regardless of form, in situations 1 (talking with group), 7 (working on project), 9 (party), 10 (blind date), 11 (divorce suit), 12 (competing for grades), 14 (sex counseling) and 15 (major surgery). Blacks felt more comfortable than whites, regardless of form, in situations 4 (integrated neighborhood) and 5 (integrated dorm).

The results of the interactions showed that in situation 1 (talking with group) whites were more comfortable than blacks in being the minority but were less comfortable than blacks in an integrated setting. In situation 6 (black

faculty) blacks were more comfortable than whites as a minority, while whites were more comfortable than blacks as a majority. In situation 13 (civil rights discussion) whites were more comfortable than blacks as a minority while blacks were more comfortable than whites as a majority or in an integrated situation. In situation 15 (major surgery) whites were more comfortable than blacks as a minority or majority but there were no black-white differences on integration.

Discussion

That both black and white students generally felt most comfortable in an integrated situation indicates that the recent policies and practices in higher education may be having some effect on students. Of course the subjects may have felt this was what the experimenters wanted to hear, but even the fact that they would indicate integration as a desired outcome seems important. The results seem to support Amir's (1969) contention that positive race relations depend on coming together in an atmosphere of equality.

That both blacks and whites preferred to be in a majority at parties and on blind dates underscores the importance of considering social situations separately. Educators have perhaps been too quick to judge the overall black-white interactions at a school based on social interaction only. There are many plausible explanations for a given group to feel most socially comfortable with members of its own group. Cultural and racial social expression is possible without "putting down" another group.

Looking at the results in terms of social distance (Bogardus, 1933), it could also be that blacks and whites have reached the point of being fairly comfortable in more formal and academic settings, but have not done so in those situations involving close social distance, such as parties, dating or having

major surgery. Social distance is defined as the closeness of contact one group allows another to have. This social distance interpretation of the results is compatible with the findings of Sedlacek and Brooks (1970, 1972), who found that white students felt positive toward blacks as magazine salesmen or policemen, but were negative toward blacks as members of their social group or as fiancés.

Another important result in this study is that blacks were generally less comfortable than whites in all situations. The only situations where blacks were more comfortable than whites involved living in an integrated dorm or neighborhood. What this says for educators is that black students are less sure of themselves on a white campus except in situations they have encountered or at least contemplated before. Thus the repeated calls to consider a student's cultural and racial background in designing courses and student activities seem to be supported in this study. Our goal should be to reach a point where both black and white students feel equally comfortable on a campus such as the University of Maryland.

The interactions seemed to indicate that whites were more comfortable than blacks as a minority in talking with a group generally or on civil rights. The talking generally situation supports the point discussed above that whites are generally more comfortable than blacks. The civil rights discussion situation raises another issue. If whites feel that they must have blacks present in order to understand or discuss civil rights we may have tapped an important problem.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1975) discuss the point that whites commonly view racism, integration, civil rights, etc., as a black problem. Whites don't see themselves as part of it. One of the primary principles to Sedlacek and Brooks' method of eliminating racism in education is to get whites to understand that

whites control and dominate blacks in many ways and these can be acted upon without having to bring in a black for verification. In short, the problems of racism in education are primarily white problems.

This study has provided information on the current state of black-white student interaction on a predominantly white campus. While there were some negative findings, generally the results appeared to indicate that blacks and whites are approaching equality in their relations with one another.

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TABLE 1

Means* and Standard Deviations for Form and Race Groups

SITUATIONS	FORM[a] (A&D) Minority (*N*=112) Mean	S.D.	(B&C) Majority (*N*=109) Mean	S.D.	(E) Equal (*N*=93) Mean	S.D.	RACE[b] Black (*N*=138) Mean	S.D.	White (*N*=176) Mean	S.D.
1. Talking to black (white, integrated) students on campus	2.96	1.10	2.31	0.90	2.04	0.85	2.73	1.11	2.26	0.91
2. Coming into a room where a group of black (white, integrated) people are already talking	3.61	1.03	2.92	1.00	2.37	0.92	3.05	1.17	3.00	1.06
3. Participating in a classroom discussion when all of the students are black (white, integrated)	3.39	1.08	3.33	1.11	2.29	0.98	3.15	1.24	2.98	1.12
4. Moving to a neighborhood where all of the people are black (white, integrated)	3.98	0.94	3.78	1.09	2.71	1.08	3.36	1.15	3.67	1.17
5. Living in an all black (white, integrated) dorm	4.08	0.92	3.98	1.16	2.05	0.98	3.28	1.29	3.58	1.41
6. Being taught by a black faculty member in an all black (white, integrated) school	3.11	1.23	1.84	0.95	1.69	0.83	2.31	1.18	2.22	1.26
7. Working on a project with a group of all black (white, integrated) students	2.91	1.10	2.77	1.07	2.03	0.89	2.94	1.16	2.37	1.03
8. Walking down the street at night in a black (white, integrated) neighborhood by yourself	4.23	0.95	4.23	0.92	3.38	1.33	3.89	1.20	4.06	1.08
9. Being at a party where all of the people there are black (white, integrated)	3.92	1.01	4.00	1.06	2.51	1.15	3.77	1.18	3.32	1.27
10. Going out on a blind date when you knew your date would be black (white, any race)	3.81	1.30	4.15	1.05	3.97	1.17	4.24	1.11	3.77	1.18
11. Having an all black (white, integrated) law firm represent you in a divorce suit	2.87	1.26	2.89	1.19	2.31	1.01	3.19	1.16	2.33	1.06
12. Competing for grades against blacks (whites, integrated students) in the classroom	2.68	1.38	2.29	1.17	2.15	1.12	3.06	1.28	1.85	0.93
13. Discussing civil rights with blacks (whites, integrated group)	2.82	1.30	2.57	1.11	2.27	0.91	2.65	1.28	2.53	1.03
14. Participating in a group counseling session discussing sex with all blacks (whites, integrated group)	2.87	1.24	2.84	1.19	2.18	0.91	2.86	1.29	2.49	1.04
15. Having an all black (white, integrated) team of of surgeons do major surgery on you	2.56	1.32	2.65	1.31	2.08	1.15	2.85	1.31	2.12	1.17

* 1=very comfortable; 5=very uncomfortable

[a] Differences significant at .05 on all items.

[b] Differences significant at .05 on all items except 2, 3, 6, 8 and 13.